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http://www.vpr.net/episode/53463/mares-recycled-water/

## Commentary Series

7:55 a.m. and 5:55 p.m. Weekdays on VPR

#### Mares: Recycled Water

Monday, 04/23/12 7:55am

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By Bill Mares, Produced by Betty Smith-Mastaler



(Host) For much of our history Americans have treated water as an almost unlimited commodity, equally suitable for washing, watering the garden and drinking. But writer and commentator Bill Mares is a former teacher and state legislator who thinks that attitude is changing.

(Mares) Twenty five years ago, a fellow legislator Don Cioffi and I made fun of Killington Ski Area for their plan to spray treated sewage water onto the slopes. We created a bogus "Vermont Association for Sanitary Skiing" and made up a bumper sticker, in white and brown, naturally, which read: KILLINGTON, WHERE THE AFFLUENT MEET THE EFFLUENT. There were a few hours of amusement and annoyance in the State House, and we returned to our business. Now the joke is on me. Killington was way ahead of its time.

Living as I do in view of Lake Champlain it's hard to think that there's a water crisis, but growth, drought and the effects of global climate change are taking a toll, especially in the arid West. So as rainfall becomes less predictable and aquifers dry up, more attention turns to water re-cycling. A recent National Academy of Sciences report says that "Expanding water reuse, through the use of treated wastewater for irrigation, industrial use and even drinking water could significantly increase the national total water resources."

The report says that "the risk of exposure to microbial and chemical contamination from drinking reclaimed water doesn't appear to be any higher than the risk experienced in at least some current drinking water systems, and may be (significantly) lower."

Depending upon the end use, water managers "can choose from a portfolio of treatment options in designing a wastewater reclamation system." And it's worth noting that unintentional reuse of treated waste water is in fact already quite common, as when surface water coming from an upland wastewater discharge enters a municipal drinking water system. Another example of de-facto re-use occurs in some Vermont towns that depend on rivers for part of their water supply.

Out West, re-cycling water is big business. El Paso Texas recycles all its wastewater. Most goes into cooling industrial plants, or waters playing fields, but some goes back into the ground water and into the Rio Grande River.

As more communities explore water re-use, the biggest challenge may be psychological. After meeting with water biotech industry executives, San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders became an advocate, and authorized focus groups and public relations campaigns. He now says, "The public is worried about scarcity. If science is behind you and you can prove that, I think people are willing to listen." The San Diego Times Tribune agreed. An editorial headline read "Yuck factor. Get over it!"

The inflammatory catch-phrase "toilet to tap" is giving way to what one advocate calls "toilet to treatment to treatment to treatment to tap."

Getting back to Lake Champlain... the exit pipe for my treated sewage is not a half mile from the intake pipe for my drinking water. And when I think of all the other treatment plants feeding into the Lake - well - I'd like to offer Killington a belated but sincere apology!

## **More from Commentary Series**



**Hunter: One Of Life's Mysteries** 

Monday, 04/23/12 5:55pm

Spring is a time for celebrating all things green and growing. And for writer, historian and commentator Edith Hunter, it's also a time for remembering.



#### **Dunsmore: Battle Fatigue**

Friday, 04/20/12 7:55am

The war news from Afghanistan was not good this past week - although diplomatic talks with Iran over its nuclear program after a long hiatus show some promise. Barrie Dunsmore brings us up to date.



## **Coffin: Cowslips in April**

Thursday, 04/19/12 5:55pm

Howard Coffin is an author and historian whose specialty is the Civil War. Apparently, he's also fond of some of the first greens of the season.

## More from Bill Mares



## Mares: Recycled Water

Monday, 04/23/12 7:55am -

For much of our history Americans have treated water as an almost unlimited commodity, equally suitable for washing, watering the garden and drinking. But Bill Mares thinks that attitude is changing.



#### Mares: Thoughts on the Titanic

Tuesday, 04/10/12 5:55pm -

The sinking of the Titanic is on everyone's mind this week, but Bill Mares has also been thinking about another North Atlantic tragedy that took place three years later.



#### Mares: Death with Dignity

Thursday, 03/22/12 5:55pm -

In the first of Two Views on the Right To Die debate, we hear from writer and commentator Bill Mares, a former teacher and state legislator who supports Vermont Senate Bill-103, or the Death with Dignity bill, because of his own mother's self-deliverance.